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ABSTRACT

This trainer's guide is designed for day care center directors and others responsible for teacher training and parent education who wish to develop and present workshops based on the manual "Blocks - A Creative Curriculum for Early Childhood." The guide is divided into five sections, called "sessions," which correspond to the first five chapters in the block manual. Each of the five sessions is designed as a complete workshop and includes suggestions on techniques for conveying the information in a workshop setting. Session topics include: (1) getting acquainted with blocks; (2) arranging space and materials for block play; (3) the teacher's role in the block corner; (4) dramatic play with blocks; and (5) mathematics and problem solving in block play. Two handouts concerning stages of block building and arranging the space and materials for block play are appended. This teacher's guide is not intended to be used alone and is thought to be helpful only when read in conjunction with the block manual, which is available in both English and Spanish. (Author/RH)

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TRAINER'S GUIDE TO

BLOCKS

A CREATIVE CURRICULUM FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD

by

DIANE TRISTER DODGE

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TRAINER'S GUIDE TO BLOCKS

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INTRODUCTION

This Trainer's Guide is offered as a supplement to the Block Curriculum Manual. It is designed for day care center directors and others responsible for teacher training and parent education who wish to develop and present workshops based on the information in the Manual. It is not intended to be used alone and is helpful only when read in conjunction with the Block Manual.

An initial word on workshops is essential at this point. In a workshop format:

- The framework is prepared and set by a leader. The content is brought out through discussions in which all the participants share their own feelings and personal experiences. A workshop leader rarely lectures.
- Usually the whole group works together, but smaller groups (two to five people) can be formed if needed to encourage communication. The movement which occurs in the change from large to small groups and back again can help to maintain a high level of interest in the workshop.
- Insofar as possible, every workshop allows for the exploration and use of materials being presented. The participants in a well-structured workshop are almost constantly involved in activities and the discussion flows during and after the experience.

We suggest a workshop approach because we believe that the process of training cannot be separated from the content. How

one approaches training and actually implements a training program is part of the training itself. Effective training can be facilitated by:

- encouraging participation. Trainees learn by doing, discovering ideas for themselves, and being actively involved with the materials.
- basing the training on participants' needs. Participants are asked to state their concerns and needs on the particular topic and the trainer continually relates the content to these concerns.
- drawing on the participants' backgrounds. Training is made meaningful by drawing on the personal experiences and observations of the participants.
- setting forth specific goals and objectives which are clearly stated and understood by all. The content is continually related to these goals.
- emphasizing skills, not right answers. There are many ways to reach the same goals and learning is a continual process for everyone.
- valuing the contributions and struggles of each person.

The workshop approach provides an opportunity for the trainer to model the role of the teacher in the classroom. This involves:

- preparing the materials and displaying them attractively.
- providing a structure for the activities within which participants can freely explore and make their own discoveries.
- pulling together the ideas and observations of participants.
- helping participants to relate the information to their own work with children.
- interacting with participants in the workshop as you hope they will work with children in the classroom.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

The Trainer's Guide is divided into five sections, called "sessions", which correspond to the first five chapters in the Block Manual. Each of the five is designed to make up an entire workshop. It is also possible to combine topics in several chapters. For example, a workshop based on Chapter I, "Getting Acquainted With Blocks," might also include discussions on the teacher's role in the Block Corner from Chapter III or some firsthand experiences with problem solving activities from Chapter V. The sixth chapter in the Manual entitled, "Other Types Of Blocks," contains information on commercially available blocks as well as instructions on making your own blocks. This information might be incorporated into an introductory workshop or one based on Chapter II, Arranging Space And Materials For Block Play.

If you are conducting a series of workshops with the same people, you may wish to base your choice of topics on the specific concerns and interests of your group. You can uncover their preferences at the beginning of the first session using some of the suggestions in this Guide. If, on the other hand, you are a frequent visitor to the classrooms of the teachers in your workshop, you may already be familiar with the problems that exist. You might ask yourself a few questions:

- How do the classrooms look?
- Is there a clearly defined area for block building?
- Is the area protected from traffic?
- Are the blocks attractively displayed and organized by shape and size?
- Do the children know where to find and return the accessories they need?
- Who uses the Block Corner? Boys and girls? Only boys? The same children each day?
- Do you see constructive building or aimless activity in the Block Area?
- Do the teachers interact with the children and provide guidance and encouragement?
- Are the materials in good condition?
- What evidence do you see that children are learning skills and concepts?
- Are children recreating the world around them?

Your own assessment of the training needs plus the feedback you receive in the workshop itself, will help you select the topics that are most relevant for your group.

Another way to select topics for workshops is to refer to the list of CDA competencies, specifically those behaviors related to the Block Area. The topics covered in the Manual are designed to help teachers develop these competencies.

Once you have decided on the content you wish to cover, the Trainer's Guide offers suggestions on techniques for conveying

the information in a workshop setting. We want to stress that these are suggestions. We do not mean to imply that they are the only valid way of conducting a workshop. Each person using the Guide is encouraged to develop his or her own best ways of presenting the material. This may vary depending on the individual trainer, the goals you have established, the setting and the cultural background and learning styles of the participants. For example, some cultural groups feel most comfortable with a more direct approach to learning and would not be at ease in the brainstorming or role-playing activities described in this Trainer's Guide.

A final word of introduction. We cannot emphasize enough the importance of taking the time to plan your workshop thoroughly. This Guide is intended to help in that effort. Though careful planning may prove to be time consuming, it invariably multiplies the value of the workshop to the participants and increases the rewards for you as the trainer.

SESSION I

GETTING ACQUAINTED WITH BLOCKS

I-1. What are blocks?

The first session gives participants an opportunity to explore their feelings about using blocks with young children and to experience firsthand some of the enjoyment as well as the frustrations in playing with blocks. Discussing concerns and problems at the beginning of the workshop helps the group develop a sense of unity around a common set of needs and goals. Once these nave been identified, you can inform participants when you plan to cover different topics by distributing a printed schedule. The group block-building experience also enhances this sense of cohesiveness which is especially important when you are working with a group of people who did not know each other prior to attending the workshop. It provides a good "hands-on" experience for introducing the stages of building. As a trainer, your role will be to make comments about what is happening so that participants focus on the situations that arise. The constructions made can then serve as a focus for discussing the types of structures made by children. The handouts which are included in the Appendix to this Guide will reinforce this learning.

I-2. Exploring how you feel about blocks.

One approach to identifying the concerns participants have about blocks is to structure a group process such as brainstorming. Brainstorming involves having people work in small groups and asking them to say whatever ideas come to mind on a particular topic. It's a good ice-breaker because it is fun. It is also a good way to elicit ideas and feelings participants have on a subject.

Divide the group into teams of approximately four people each. Describe "brainstorming" and give each team a large piece of paper and a magic marker. There should be one person responsible for recording all the ideas from each team. You might say:

> *"Imagine that your center director wants to give you a set of blocks for your classroom, but you are adamantly opposed. You definitely do not want blocks. They make your job too difficult; they create problems; you don't like the way children use them and you just don't want to be bothered. Take about four minutes to come up with as many arguments as you can to convince your center director not to give you a set of blocks."*

You can make a judgment about how long to allow these discussions to continue depending on the group's involvement. When they seem finished, you can give the reverse assignment:

> *"This time, imagine that your center director does not want to invest in blocks, but you feel that they are a valuable teaching tool and an important part of your program. Take four minutes to think up arguments to convince your center director of the importance of blocks. Record all ideas on another large piece of paper."*

When people seem to be running out of ideas ask everyone to come back to the large group. With the lists clearly visible to the participants, have each group present its ideas.

The list of negative reactions to blocks can serve as a springboard for identifying real problems participants want to consider.

> *"Which of these arguments really <u>are</u> problems you face in your classroom?"*

Write down a list of topics the group wishes to explore during the series of workshops. You might compare the list your group develops with those in the Block Manual on pp. 6 and 7. This will enable you to identify what topics will be covered and when. A similar list can be made of why blocks are a good learning tool. At the end of the workshop series, these lists can serve as a good checklist to see if all the topics have been covered and all the problems discussed.

I-3. <u>Observing children.</u>

If you find this section helpful, you might want to develop an observation sheet to help participants focus on certain aspects of children's behavior in the Block Corner. The questions on page 9 of the Manual could serve as a guide for additional questions. As a follow up, you can ask people to be prepared to share their observations at the following session.

I-4. Stages of block building.

Children as well as adults learn best from first-hand experiences. For this reason, you might wish to precede your discussion on the stages of block building by giving participants an opportunity to build themselves.

Ask each person to select some blocks and find a space on the floor.

> *"This time we will not use accessories - just the blocks themselves. Consider the blocks as an art material. You don't have to make anything in particular, just look at the block shapes and let your structure develop as you build."*

You will want to allow at least fifteen minutes of building time, depending on how involved participants become. When adults start building, we often see some of the same situations that come up in classrooms:

- building too close together
- accidentally knocking down someone else's building
- building right next to the block shelves so that it's difficult for others to get more blocks
- running out of a shape you need and having to improvise (i.e., substituting two square blocks for one unit block).

While participants are building, or afterwards when you have the group's attention, comment on some of the situations you observed.

For example:

"Why did your building get knocked down?"

"What can you use in place of a long block?"

"How did you feel trying to build in such a crowded space?"

"What happened when you tried to reach more blocks and Nancy's building was in your way?"

"How did you enjoy using the blocks and what did you learn that might be helpful to you in your own classroom?"

To introduce the stages of building, you can begin with the block structures made by the participants. Ask the group to look around at all the different block constructions. They are all quite different, but certain patterns begin to stand out:

"Is there anything in particular that you notice about the buildings here?"

You will probably notice that many of the structures are well balanced and often have a definite pattern. We also see this in children's buildings. Discuss how this experience relates to what participants have observed when children build.

"What kinds of things do the children in your centers do with blocks?"

"What is most typical of two and three-year-olds? Four and five-year-olds?"

After this discussion, you can distribute the hand-out on "Stages of Block Building" (included at the end of the Guide) and allow time for participants to read it over. Compare these stages with the types of buildings created in the workshop.

I-5. Helping children from one stage to the next.

One question that often arises when discussing the stages of block building and how children move from one stage to the next is what role the teacher should play. On pages 15-16 of the Manual there is a discussion on helping children move from one stage to the next. This would be an appropriate time to present some of these ideas. The topic is covered extensively in Chapter III on the Teacher's Role.

I-6. Preserving buildings by photos or sketches.

Ask participants how they feel about taking down their buildings. It is often difficult for children to do this. Encourage participants to share their classroom experiences.

"Are you able to leave buildings up for several days?"

"If so, do you find that interest in the Block Area increases and you see more complex structures?"

Many centers are unable to leave buildings standing after the work period. If you can preserve the children's work in some way, it gives the message that you value what they have done. Share ideas on how buildings can be "preserved." Try to have a Polaroid camera available so participants can learn how to use it. Some may want to take a picture of their building. Encourage others to make a sketch of their construction. Post these pictures in the workshop room.

I-7. Cleaning up the Block Corner.

Getting children to clean-up in the Block Area is often mentioned as one of the more difficult problems for teachers. Share experiences:

"What makes block clean-up difficult?"

"What methods have you tried and found successful?"

Record ideas suggested by participants and add those listed in the Manual. You might want to print a chart of suggestions or give each participant a copy at the next workshop. Decide together which method you will use to clean up the blocks from the workshop.

I-8. Suggestions for further activities.

You can hand out suggestions for further activities and have participants try some of the ideas in their classrooms. Make plans to share experiences at the beginning of the next workshop.

SESSION II

ARRANGING SPACE AND MATERIALS FOR BLOCK PLAY

II-1. Room arrangement and behavior.

The main goal of this session is to consider how room arrangement and the display of materials affect children's behavior and to give participants practical suggestions on how to arrange their Block Corner. When we think of room arrangement and the display of materials, we rarely connect them to the behavior of children. Ask participants if they have ever rearranged their classrooms and been surprised by the resulting changes in children's behavior. A short discussion may follow which would lead into the content of this session.

(A) Behavior characteristics which encourage/discourage development and learning.

One way to begin is to consider positive as well as negative behavior. Ask each person to think about a child they know who is really ready to learn and who they enjoy teaching. Have them spend a minute thinking about that child and his or her behavior and then share what the child is like with the person sitting next to them. In the large group, ask each team to share their ideas and compile a list of the types of behavior teacher want to encourage in children.

Next, have participants think of a child who really "bugs" them - whose behavior is upsetting to adults and not conducive to learning. Again ask people to share these experiences with a neighbor. In the large group, list the types of behavior which is troublesome to adults. You might check in the Manual to get an idea of the types of behavior teachers have mentioned.

(B) How different arrangements encourage different behavior.

Ask participants to consider if they would arrange their room differently depending on the behavior of their children.

> *"If the majority of the children were showing behavior which was troublesome (refer to the list you made) how might you change the classroom environment to make it more conducive to learning?"*

Participants may come up with suggestions such as the following:

- put out simple toys such as cars and people figures to use with blocks.
- reduce the variety of block shapes so that children can use them and clean up successfully.
- divide up the room into clearly defined areas.

To consider this further, divide the participants into smaller groups and distribute the handout on floor plans.

> *"Take time to study the first floor plan, particularly the location of the Block Corner. What kind of behavior would you expect to see in this classroom?"*

Page 25 of the Block Manual lists some problems with the room arrangement identified by teachers. After participants have had about five minutes to consider the floor plan, ask each group to share their ideas. It is helpful to summarize this discussion

on the board or a large piece of paper. Next, have the groups consider the second floor plan of the same room after it was rearranged.

> *"What changes have been made and how might the children's behavior be different?"*

The resulting discussion might include the points on page 26 of the Manual.

(C) Guidelines for a Block Area that will encourage development and learning.

You may wish to have participants evolve their own guidelines for setting up a Block Area. On page 27 of the Manual we have listed seven guidelines to consider in arranging a room. If you prefer, you can distribute these guidelines to the class and discuss them.

(D) Illustrations on arranging an area for block play.

The pictures in this section can be duplicated and distributed to the participants. You can use the script to guide your discussion or pose your own questions.

One way to help participants apply what they are learning in the workshop to their own classroom is to have them bring in a floor plan of their room. After discussing the handout and looking at the room arrangement pictures, participants can work in small groups to share floor plans and make suggestions to each other on ways to organize their space more effectively.

II-2. Arranging the materials for block play.

(A) Accessories for block play.

In discussing basic accessories, it would be helpful to have samples on hand for participants to examine. You might ask what accessories they put out in their classrooms and which ones children seem to prefer. The variety of accessories, including the use of raw materials so that children can make their own, is covered in Chapter IV of the Manual.

(B) Illustrations on arrangement of materials.

It is not only the spatial arrangement of the classroom which affects children's behavior. How we organize and display materials also has a profound impact on children and teachers. Pictures in Chapter II of the Manual in Section 2 (B) cover this topic and can serve as a focal point for your discussion. After looking at the pictures, ask for questions or comments.

"What have you seen in these pictures that you feel would be useful to try in your classroom?"

"What ideas stand out to you?"

(C) Some questions teachers often ask.

We have listed here a few of the questions often heard from teachers in workshops. They are typical of some of the concerns teachers have but are certainly not all inclusive. You may want to pose these questions and ask the group if they would like to discuss any or all of them.

(1) "How many blocks should I put out?"

This topic may have come up in viewing the illustrations. In the Manual on pp. 41 and 42 several points are listed which you could present to your group for consideration.

(2) "What do I do when children can't share?"

Children fighting over blocks and other toys is a common problem often mentioned by adults who work with young children. If your group has this concern, lead a discussion on why sharing is difficult for many preschool children. On page 42 a few reasons are listed, but your group may come up with more. Ask participants for ideas on how to improve the situation:

> *"What can we do in the Block Corner to prevent the fighting and unhappy feelings resulting from the need to share?"*

In the Manual you will find several ideas which have worked for other teachers. (See pp. 42-43 in the Manual.)

(3) "What is a planning board?"

A planning board is one way to help children decide on an activity. It is also useful as a tool in limiting the number of children in an activity area. They are simple to construct and it would be most helpful if you made one before the workshop to demonstrate it to participants. All you need is a piece of pegboard (approximately 1 foot x 2 feet), pegs and cards for each child. (See description in Manual, pp. 43-44.)

(4) "How do I help children learn to take turns?"

Ask participants how they help children learn to take turns. Clearly, we can't and wouldn't want to always avoid having children share materials. Part of growing is learning to give up something and trusting that you will have a turn yourself. We all know how difficult it is for a child to wait. On pp. 45 through 46 there are some practical suggestions for helping children wait for their turn. You and your group will probably come up with others.

II-3. Suggestions for further activities.

These activities may be given as practical assignments for participants to try out in their own classrooms. If you do this, be sure to provide time at the beginning of the next session to share experiences.

If you wish to extend the workshop on room arrangement and the display of materials to the total classroom environment, there is an audio-visual training package, "Room Arrangement As A Teaching Strategy," which can be obtained by writing to Creative Associates.

SESSION III

THE TEACHER'S ROLE IN THE BLOCK CORNER

Introduction.

The topics covered in this session are based on some of the real concerns expressed by teachers. It is important to inform the participants in your workshop of what subject areas you will present and try to relate them to the concerns expressed in your group.

A statement of the philosophy which underlies the suggested approaches to working with children is included at the beginning of Chapter III in the Block Manual. You may wish to reproduce this and give each participant a copy. You could lead a discussion focusing on the reactions of the group to each of the statements. You might ask participants how they would apply the principles to working with children in the Block Corner.

III-1. Getting children into the Block Corner.

The illustration in the Manual showing how one teacher helped a child get started in the Block Corner could easily be

produced as a short skit. If you are giving the workshop with another trainer, you could do it together. Otherwise, recruit one of the participants before the workshop and explain what you will do. You might begin by asking the teachers in your group if there are children in their classrooms who never, or very rarely, choose the Block Corner.

> *"What are some reasons these children might be avoiding the Block Area?"*

Teachers have suggested ideas such as

- they are afraid of the noise in the Block Corner.
- they don't know how to begin.
- they see blocks as a "boys only" activity.

Your group may have other ideas.

> *"How can a teacher help the child who is too shy to enter the Block Area?"*

This question can be answered by the skit. It usually generates some discussion. Ask participants afterwards:

> *"What did you notice about what the teacher did?"*
>
> *"What did the teacher do and say to make the child feel comfortable?"*

III-2. <u>Involving girls in block play.</u>

Hopefully this will be a topic of interest and concern to your participants. In so many classrooms, blocks are the boys' domain and few girls venture forth to build. This topic

can generate a good deal of discussion. Ask for participants' experiences in the classroom and what ideas they might have to involve girls in block play. We have made a number of suggestions you may wish to include in your discussion.

III-3. Talking to children about their buildings.

It is not always easy to think of interesting comments to make about block constructions, yet what we say influences children greatly. The teacher who always says, "Oh, that's nice," may eventually evoke the comment, "She always says that."

The approach suggested in the Block Manual involves:

- commenting specifically on what the child has done - "You made a bridge for your car!"
- commenting on how the child used the blocks - "You used only the square blocks and made a big pile of them."
- asking specific questions - "How did you get that block to balance?"

The discussion in the Manual gives other suggestions and shows actual drawings of block constructions used in our workshop as a focus for brainstorming ideas on what adults can say to children in the Block Corner. You might like to try this approach in your workshop. We have found that giving adults an opportunity to brainstorm leads to the development of some very creative ways of describing children's buildings.

III-4. Extending block building.

We have all noticed children who seem to be "stuck" in a particular way of building. Sometimes it's difficult to know how to help them extend their ideas. If this is a concern of your teachers, you might ask what techniques have been tried and if they were successful. Some suggestions include:

- getting down on the floor and helping a child solve a problem
- offering a new block shape
- showing children a book or picture related to what they are making in the Block Corner.

You may wish to present these, plus other ideas in the Manual, and discuss them.

III-5. The teacher's role in resolving disputes.

Discipline is the one topic most often brought up by teachers. A good way to introduce this topic of discussion is to ask two questions:

"What behavior problems bother you most in the Block Area?"

"What are your goals for children in terms of behavior?"

If you feel comfortable with our approach of helping children learn to solve their own disputes, the books recommended as

well as the discussion in the Manual on pages 61 - 65 may be especially helpful. The issues presented are ones brought up by teachers and may well be important to the participants in your workshop. Reading them over may help you prepare for a discussion on the merits of various approaches.

Rules in the Block Corner should be clearly stated and simple. We have listed some basic rules in the Block Manual (p. 63) but you may prefer to have your group develop its own. The process of deciding on rules and discussing which are most important, is a more valuable learning experience than having the ideas presented.

Sign writing as a technique in handling disputes has proven very powerful and effective in some classrooms. The discussion in the Manual explains how it was used in one preschool classroom. If you present this idea, ask the teachers in your group to try it out with the children in their classrooms and share the results at the next workshop. There is usually an enthusiastic reaction from children to writing signs and this topic will be more meaningful if the participants have an opportunity to try it in their own classrooms.

III-6. Teacher's role in cleaning up.

Try holding a meeting with the participants in your group after a block-building experience and before asking them to clean-up. You might describe how this suggestion applies to the classroom and specifically how it was used in one preschool classroom. (See p. 67 in the Block Manual.)

III-7. Suggestions for further activities.

Included are many ideas on how to implement the topics covered in this session. If you duplicate them and distribute the sheet to participants, they will be more likely to try them out in their classrooms.

SESSION IV

DRAMATIC PLAY WITH BLOCKS

The purpose of this session is to give participants an opportunity to experience working cooperatively with others to recreate an aspect of the world around them. In so doing, we hope participants will see that blocks offer meaningful learning opportunities through dramatic play. As the trainer your role will be to help participants relate information to their own classrooms, to set up the activity and to model the techniques teachers can use to stimulate, support, and extend dramatic play using blocks with young children.

In order to prepare for this session, you will need to arrange an area for block building with at least one or two complete sets of unit blocks. Props and accessories for block play are included in this session and you may wish to begin collecting them in advance. A selection of traditional, commercially made props are listed in the Manual on p. 74 and can be displayed on a table. In addition, the following supplies may be included:

Lego
rug scraps
sponge scraps
spools
staplers
paper money

fabric scraps
paper
scissors
crayons
pipe cleaners
rubber bands
paper clips
fasteners

assorted small bottles
cylinders
beans
gravel
plastic tools
pulleys
rope

At the end of Chapter IV in the Manual you will find a list of books for children with good pictures and content for stimulating dramatic play in the Block Area. This is by no means exhaustive. If you spend fifteen minutes at the library in the children's section you will be able to pick up a sampling of books to use in the workshop. These can also be included on the "prop supply table."

IV-1. What is dramatic play in the Block Area?

After going over the goals for this session, you might begin by leading a discussion about dramatic play. The Manual offers a definition and sample themes children often explore. (pp. 71-74) You may find it's a good idea to record on a chalkboard or a large sheet of paper the themes participants have observed children creating in their classrooms. This may serve as a starting point for your group in deciding on the themes they wish to develop.

IV-2. Accessories and props for recreating real settings with blocks.

The prop table you have set up can serve as the focal point for a discussion of accessories which are useful for block play. A good place to begin is to ask participants what types of props they have in their classrooms and which ones children seem to prefer. You can briefly talk about the types of props and materials you have set out.

IV-3. The teacher's role in fostering dramatic play in the Block Corner.

Allow at least one hour for this activity. The goals are:

- to experience what children do when they plan and create elaborate block constructions
- to see how much detail can be represented on a theme with blocks and props
- to experience the teacher's role being modeled.

Ask participants to find one or two other people to build with and spend a few minutes deciding on a theme. Ask each group to specify what theme they have chosen so that you don't end up with five zoos! The instructions are:

- find a space on the floor that will be large enough.
- begin with blocks only, no props.

- as the theme develops, add props. If you don't see what you need, use the materials available to create your own.
- build as adults; you do not have to pretend to be young children.
- enjoy yourselves.

As the trainer, your job will be to model the role of the teacher in a classroom. Read the two descriptions of classroom situations that are in the Manual. The zoo and the police station show how the teacher stimulated block play by observing, listening and facilitating.

During the workshop you will be:

- Observing what participants are doing: *"I see you are making a farm."*
- Asking questions to extend their ideas: *"What do the animals on your farm eat?" "What will happen to the milk that the farmer has just taken from the cows?"*
- Leading discussions: *"Your farm has a house for the people and a barn for the animals. What else does a farm have?"*
- Showing pictures or reading a story to clarify facts or to provide additional information for the builders to use.
- Providing props or suggesting ways to make props to further stimulate play: *"The fire engine you are using seems to need some more equipment. Let's see what we have on the table to make the things you need."*
- Discussing with the participants how their structures have changed as they expanded their ideas.

After the groups have completed their buildings, spend a few minutes at each building site with the entire group to allow the builders to talk about their constructions: e.g., what they made; how it evolved; how it works. Sometimes participants will actually stage a dramatization on their theme. You might then ask questions such as the following:

"How does this experience compare to what you have observed in the classroom?"

"In what ways would it differ?"

Participants may come up with some of the following points:

- children's buildings would probably be much less elaborate.
- you would want to give children fewer props and supplies.
- children wouldn't just build; they would use the scenes to act out roles; they'd want to be the policeman or go to the zoo.

To summarize the session, ask what people noticed about the role you played as the teacher.

"What did I do as the teacher to help you develop your block constructions?"

"Was this helpful? How?"

"Did you resent any of my suggestions as intrusions and do children sometimes feel the teacher interferes too much?"

"What can you do in your center to help dramatic play get started in the Block Area?"

Suggest to participants that they try out some of the ideas they liked in this workshop.

SESSION V

MATHEMATICS AND PROBLEM SOLVING IN BLOCK PLAY

The purpose of this session is to help participants become more aware of the potential math learning inherent in blocks and the kinds of problems children create and solve with unit blocks. The goal is to set up the workshop so that participants make these discoveries themselves and experience firsthand some of the struggles children go through in solving problems with blocks.

V-1. Discovering mathematics through block play.

Some of the mathematical relationships inherent in blocks are obvious: e.g., two squares equal one unit, two units equal one double unit, etc. There are many other relationships that children experience while playing with blocks which are less obvious. To help participants stretch their own thinking by making discoveries, divide them into teams of two and ask them to work on one of the following assignments:

> *"How many ways can you find to show mathematical relationships with unit blocks?"*

"How many ways can you find to make the following geometric shapes?"

hexagon
diamond
circle
trapezoid
parallelogram

Allow approximately ten to fifteen minutes depending on how involved the groups become. While the participants are working, you can model the role of the teacher asking questions and commenting on the discoveries being made. The Block Manual contains a number of suggestions which you might find helpful.

When it seems appropriate, allow time for each group to talk about what they have done. Then help them relate this experience to their classrooms by posing questions such as the following:

"What have you seen children doing on their own with blocks that leads you to believe they are discovering some of the mathematical relationships you have made?"

"Do children always realize on a conscious level what they have made?"

"How would the comments I made as the teacher help children become aware of what they were doing?"

"What other things can a teacher do to help children become more aware of mathematical concepts with blocks?"

(See pp. 90 - 94 of the Block Manual for a thorough discussion of these topics.)

V-2. Solving construction problems in block play.

As adults, we sometimes fail to appreciate the difficult problems children set for themselves and then solve with blocks. Not only are they difficult for children to work out, but adults themselves often have to struggle to solve them! To give your group a firsthand experience with these situations, assign tasks for them to work on. Choose tasks you have seen children, especially experienced builders, working on. A few suggestions are:

- a ramp leading to a bridge
- five steps leading to a building
- a house with windows and a roof
- an apartment house with an elevator (you will need to provide string)
- a "map" of the center or the immediate neighborhood of the center.

As the trainer, again modeling the teacher's role, you can work with individual groups to help them think through their problem. Allow time for each group to share their experiences.

"What problem did you solve?"

"How did you go about doing it?"

"Was it more complex than you thought?"

"What would a child have to do to solve the problem?"

"How might a child have solved it differently?"

In cleaning up the blocks, try one of these ideas:

- Give each participant a "ticket" with a block shape on it and he/she puts away all the blocks of that shape.
- Declare a number for the day: "Today we will clean up by fives," and have everyone collect piles of five blocks to put away.
- Have each person choose a shape to put away.

As an assignment, you can suggest that people become more aware of what children are doing with blocks that indicates they are learning math concepts or that they are working out construction problems.

SESSION I

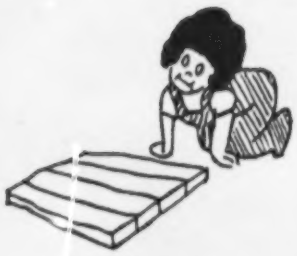
STAGES OF BLOCK BUILDING

All children go through stages in using blocks just as they do in any other area of development or learning. These stages are related, but not necessarily tied to age.

Stage I. Blocks are carried around.

Very young children often spend a long time just carrying blocks around. They are learning about blocks: how heavy they are, what they feel like, and how many can be carried at once. (This is typical of two-year-olds.)

Stage II. Piling up the blocks or laying them out on the floor.



When children first begin to build with blocks, they are likely to stack them in piles or to lay them out flat on the floor. Flat rows suggest roads and so small cars and trucks are usually the first toys children need for block play.

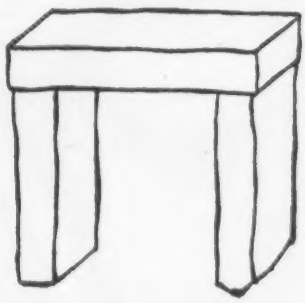
Roads are often a transition from the piling stage to the stage of making buildings.

Stage III. New way to connect blocks.

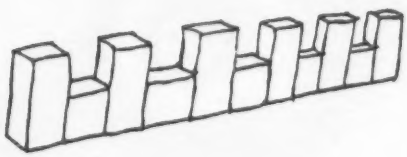
By three and four years of age, children who have been building with blocks for a period of time are usually putting blocks together to make constructions. They make discoveries and solve problems as they use blocks in new ways. Some types of buildings you may see are:

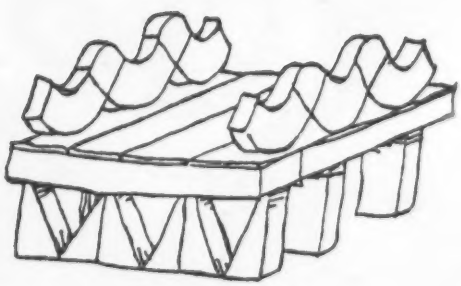
a. Enclosures - putting blocks together to enclose a space.

b. Bridging - setting up two blocks, leaving a space between them, and connecting the two blocks with another block.



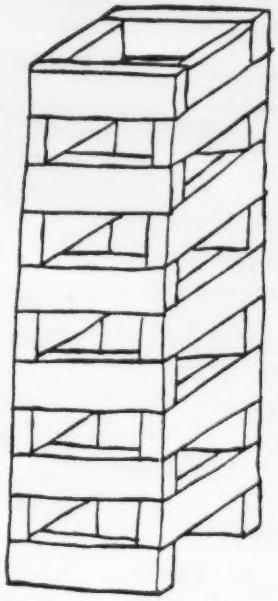
c. Decorative patterns - note the sense of symmetry.





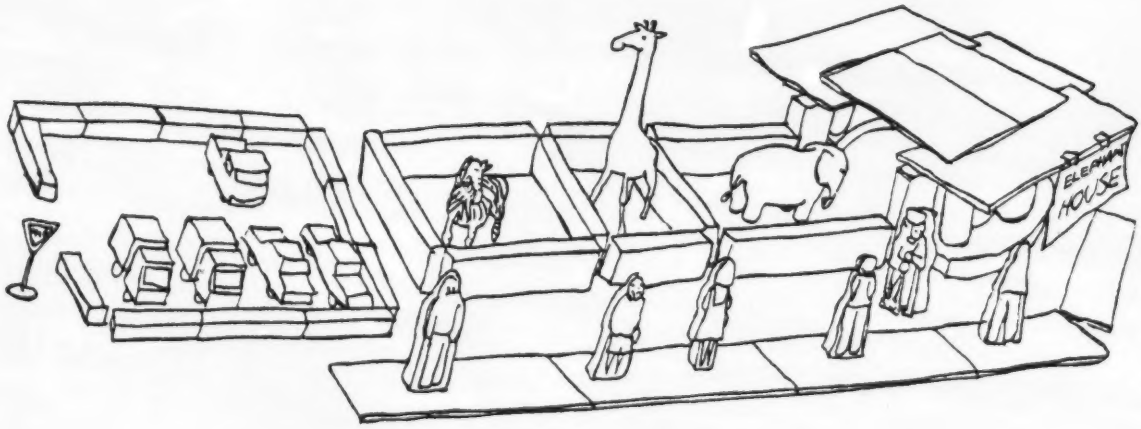
Stage IV. Naming buildings, using buildings, making elaborate Constructions.

As they get more experienced (around four to six years), children begin to name the buildings they make:

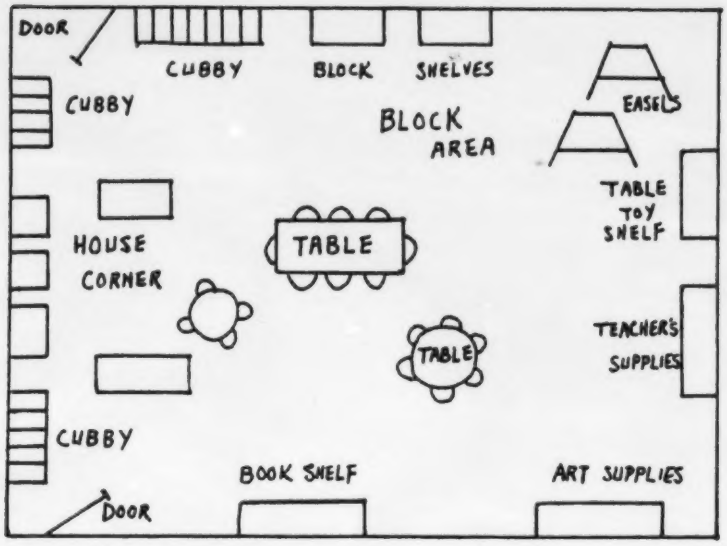


"Apartment House"

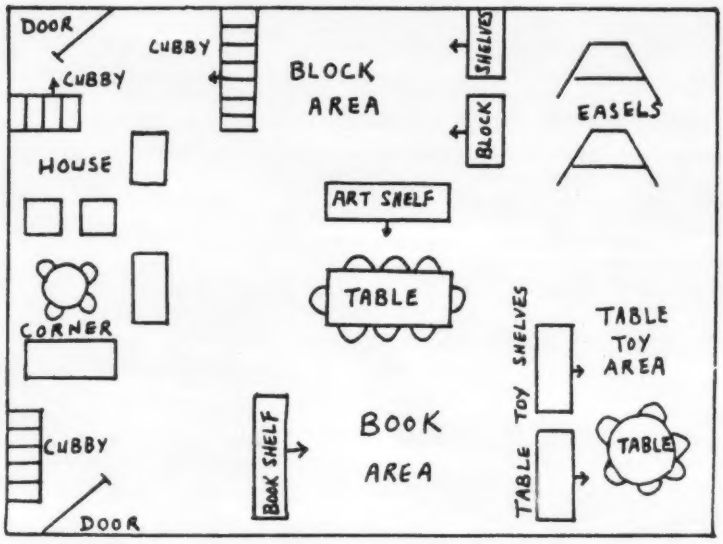
and then use the buildings for dramatic play:



SESSION II - ARRANGING SPACE AND MATERIALS FOR BLOCK PLAY



Floor Plan I



Floor Plan II

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